DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 225 CS 009 601

AUTHOR Handel, Ruth D.; Goldsmith, Ellen
TITLE Intergenerational Reading: Affecting the Literacy Environment of the Home.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Literacy; Case Studies; Childrens Literature; Family Environment; Family Involvement; *Parent Participation; Parent Student Relationship; *Program Evaluation; *Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Attitudes; Reading Research; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Intergenerational Learning; *Parent Readers Program; Reading Motivation

ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness of the Parent Readers program, an intergenerational reading project which attempted to change the reading behaviors of underprepared community college students who are parents and to affect the literacy environment of the home in ways that promote the literacy status of the parents/students and their children. The project consisted of a set of voluntary workshops in which children's literature was used to teach the adults how to read and discuss enjoyable books with their children at home. Subjects, five female low-income members of minorities ranging in age from 25 to 46 with above average participation in the workshops, were interviewed to explore the place of reading in their overall life context; the type of learning for parent and child that evolved from the workshops and from home reading, and their attitudes toward the college experience. Results indicated that in every case, intergenerational connections were made: the parents read to their children, were stimulated to read more for themselves and applied the reading comprehension strategies in seeking to understand both the children's books and their own adult selections. (One table of data is included; 12 references are attached.) (RS)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED321225

# INTERGENERATIONAL READING: AFFECTING THE LITERACY ENVIRONMENT OF THE HOME

Ruth D. Handel
Montclair State College
Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043

and

Ellen Goldsmith
New York City Technical College/CUNY
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, March 1989

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Handel, Ruth D.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS009601

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# INTERGENERATIONAL READING: AFFECTING THE LITERACY ENVIRONMENT OF THE HOME

This paper follows initial reports (Handel & Goldsmith, 1988a, 1988b) on an intergenerational reading project that attempts to change the reading behaviors of underprepared community college students who are parents and to affect the literacy environment of the home in ways that promote the literacy status both of the student/parent and of their children. This paper will present case study data that provides insight into reading practices in the home within the context of the lives of these low income, urban adults.

First, the paper will address the annual meeting theme by describing the interdependence of research and practice in the project. Next an overview of the prior project reports will be given. Then evaluation issues will be raised, and the new data presented.

## Research and Practice

The project, the Parent Readers Program, originated out of a vexing problem of practice: the reluctance of developmental reading students to become actively engaged learners in their remedial courses and their subsequent record of failure. A some 20% of that population were parents, and, in sharp contrast to their disaffection with their own reading courses, they were eager for advice on their children's educational progress. For them (as well as other family members who want to establish a reading relationship with a child) a plan of action was developed. Building on the strong parental motivation, the plan sought to operationalize research on the critical role of the family in developing children's literacy and on the need for intergenerational efforts particularly among poverty populations (cf Anderson, 1985; Hess & Holloway, 1979; Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986; Nickse, Speicher, & Buchek, 1988; Sticht, 1983, among others). Behavioral inventories helped identify essential program elements and a pilot project was developed and tested. Based on data collected, an elaborate curriculum responsive to perceived needs and interests was developed and implemented. The case study interview data is expected to contribute to the research base in the relatively new field of intergenerational learning, as well as to guide further development of this and related projects. The interdependent cycle of research and practice, it should be noted, operates on the level of the individual as well. The project casts the student/parents as practitioners - they are tutors of their children - and also as researchers - when reading to their children they make observations about child development and literacy which are later formalized. While the project has experienced often conflicting demands of research methodology versus demands of program maintenance and growth, on the level of the individual

participants we believe that the collaborative and interdependent features of the project are essential to cognitive and personal growth.

## The Parent Readers Program

The Parent Readers Program consists of a series of voluntary workshops in which children's literature is used to teach the adults how to read and discuss enjoyable books with their children at home. Building on potent motivation, the students' concern for the welfare of their children, and addressing students' adult competencies rather than their academic deficiencies, the workshops are interactive settings for modeling and practicing reading and discussion strategies, learning about children's literature, borrowing children's books and related adult selections, and reporting back on parent-child "read-aloud" sessions at home. After each set of three workshops per semester, students bring their children to the college for a family "read-aloud" party.

Participants are recruited from developmental reading classes; their reading status is below college criterion and ranges from the 7th to 11th grade level. The majority of participants are mothers. As of March 1989, the fifth semester of workshop operations, 128 students and through them some 270 children had participated in the program.

The workshops are guided by a curriculum that specifies (a) fiction and nonfiction children's literature topics (b) adult readings that parallel the genre or topic of each children's literature category and (c) reading strategies particularly appropriate to each genre or topic. The model sets out six activity components for each workshop: (a) sharing of home "read-aloud" experiences (b) an instructor "read-aloud" (c) presentation of the children's literature selection and modeling of the accompanying reading strategy (d) participant practice of the strategy through role playing and discussion (e) presentation of adult reading selection and review of the reading strategy (f) borrowing of books to read to child at home.

The workshops are experiential and interactive, designed to tap into the students' adult competencies as parents and to cast them into the proactive role of tutor to their children. Slaughter (1988) has said that strengths and resources of participants in family programs, no less than their needs, should be considered in the design and evaluation of family programs. Casting parents in the role of tutor builds that element of parental resource into the program design. Also as part of the program design and serving the same purpose of drawing on participants' resources and strengths are the opportunities for discussion during the workshops; participants share experiences in reading to their children, compare children's reactions, and often offer advice and support. Parents of same age children

might compare reactions to the same book; parents of older children advise parents of younger children on what lies ahead. In addition, parents will often use this time to communicate delight in their child's development and comment on new accomplishments they have noticed.

Data were collected by self-report instruments and informal observations of program administrators and outside experts. Pre-program instruments, administered to students prior to the initial series of workshops, helped shape program design and were not systematically administered to all subsequent participants. Evaluation instruments and forms for reporting home experiences were administered to all. Results, detailed elsewhere (Handel & Goldsmith, 1988a, 1988b), will be briefly summarized here. All participants reported a high level of participation and enjoyment of the books and reading activities both in the workshops and at home. All borrowed books from the program and reported their children's interest in the home reading experience. Participants also reported a greater awareness of the importance of actively engaging a child in reading. Other markers of progress reflected in reports of many participants included awareness of their importance as home educators, efforts to use reading comprehension strategies both in adult reading and when reading to children, greater awareness of child development issues, and increased contacts with their children's school.

Informal observation confirmed the self reports particularly with respect to participants' new-found enjoyment of reading. It has been apparent to all observers of the program that participants are having reading experiences that are enjoyable. Most dramatic testimony to the motivational value of an intergenerational program using children's literature has been the participants' transformation from apathetic student in the remedial classroom to eager competent adult in the workshop. In addition, 80% of Program participants who went on to take the College's reading test achieved at criterion compared to an overall College pass rate of 45%.

## Issues in Evaluation

The goal of the Parent Readers Program is to effect the literacy environment of the home in ways that lead to improvement of the reading competencies of both parent and child. That is a large, perhaps overly ambitious goal. Confounding the evaluation process is the number of variables represented by the parent and child population. Range of ages of the child, number of siblings, household composition, and prior child-rearing and reading practices of the parent could not be controlled. Nor could the extent of the intervention, the number of workshops attended, be controlled in this voluntary program. On average, participants have attended three workshops over the two years of program operation, although several have attended more and one or

two have attended all. (Workshop content is non-repetitive.) The end-of-semester reading party and informal contacts with the instructors provide additional ways of program participation, but overall, the program is one of minimal intervention, which is perhaps all our population needs.

In considering the methodological question of what type of evaluation makes sense for a minimal intervention program with a fluctuating client base and no large stable pool of subjects, we follow Weiss and Jacobs (1988) in proposing a broadened notion of program evaluation that takes into account the specific and differing nature of programs and that does not evaluate solely on the basis of impact. We recognize, too, as suggested by Epstein (1987) that programs can have a variety of effects en route to their overall goal, and that pragmatic realities affect any evaluation plan. Perhaps, as cited by Weiss (1988, p. 62) in describing a program with multiple goals, "evidence of accessibility, use and parent satisfaction" is "all that is possible and all that should be required." We also find useful Jacobs' (1988) 5-tier approach to evaluation for small programs in which the evaluation process consists of the following discrete elements: (1) needs analysis; (2) accountability (describing implementation, participants' needs and responses); (3) program clarification (formative evaluation which can involve outside observers); (4) progress toward objects, especially short term objectives (which documents effectiveness and provides information for program improvement); and (5) program impact, a large-scale, research-oriented effort. For the Parent Readers Program, it seems reasonable to stop at stage 4.

However, the program experience has been so rich in interpersonal interaction, and the data so suggestive of wider ramifications - parents have been drawing closer to their children, reading to other children, children have been so involved with the books - that we decided to expand upon the instruments heretofore used and embarked on another stage 4 effort, case study interviews.

In other words, as the program evolved and relationships deepened, we began to develop a focus on the participants' life styles, their transitions as they went through their education as Slaughter (1988) has suggested should, but often is not, done in family programs. We began to seek a more detailed knowledge of the participants' personal resources and coping strategies as they attempted to meet the many demands upon them. We wanted to hear in fuller measure their voices. Case study interviews would provide a deeper look at reading in the home within the overall context of these students' lives.

## Case Study Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to explore the place of reading in participants' overall life context, the type of learning for parent and child that evolved from Parent Reader workshops and from home reading, and their attitudes toward the college experience. Taped interviews, conducted by Handel and Goldsmith, lasted about 90 minutes. Ten parents, all women, were selected on the basis of above average participation in the program. Five interviews will be reported here.

As outlined in Table 1, the five women interviewed range in age from 25 to 46. They are low income members of ethnic minorities and live in urban neighborhoods. All have been enrolled in remedial courses. They are currently working for associates' degrees in liberal arts, health & human services, data processing or accounting. Children's ages range from 4 to 18; not unexpectedly, parents were more concerned with their younger as opposed to older child's development.

---

Insert Table 1 Here

---

Table

Parents Interviewed - Selected

| Name[1] | Age | Ethnicity | # of Workshops attended |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alberta P. | 42 | black | 3 |
| Gloria G. | 46 | hispanic | 7 |
| Jane T. | 25 | hispanic | 7 |
| Madeline G. | 37 | black | 4 |
| Serafina R. | 45 | hispanic | 12 |

1. Names have been changed

1

Demographic Characteristics

| Child Ages & Sex | Other Adults in Household |
|---|---|
| 18M (twins) 15M, 5M | husband |
| 13F, 11F, 4F | husband |
| 9M | none |
| 4F | male companion |
| 14M, 12M, 9F | husband |

Content analysis of the interviews was used to answer the questions: what is the literacy environment of the home and how has it been affected by the Parent Readers experience? Data from earlier Program studies as well as the research literature suggested four possible categories of parental influence on the literacy environment of the home. They are: (1) the parent as home tutor (cf Epstein, 1988); (2) the parent as reading role model; (3) the parent as literacy resource; and (4) the parent as mediator or child advocate vis a vis other institutions (cf Clark, 1983).

By home tutor we mean that the parent (a) involves the child in reading activities, (b) attempts to teach or evoke from the child reading behaviors and attitudes the parent experienced in the Parent Readers workshops, and (c) becomes sensitive to factors that promote a good reading relationship such as the child's interests, dispositions, or developmental needs.

By reading role model is meant that the parent demonstrates to the child by act or word the importance of reading in her own life, and, by extension in the lives of her children.

The parent as literacy resource provides opportunities and materials for reading, such as scheduling visits to the library or bringing books home from Program.

Clark (1983) found that parents of successful students were proactive in relation to their child's school. The parent as mediator or child advocate seemed a useful category here since the quality of a child's school life may affect literacy activities or attitudes at home.

The interviews were analyzed to determine the extent to which these categories were useful, to capture their personal meaning to participants, and to discover other possibly more important themes.

Jane T.

Jane T., a single parent, works in an accounting office while taking classes. She "pushes" her 9 year old son and is proud of his "beautiful grades." The child of illiterate parents, Jane closely monitors her son's schooling. She visits the school often, makes sure he gets enough homework, and successfully challenged a proposed special education placement.

Jane, as the other parents, involves her child in read-aloud activities. Both Jane and her son believe she is spending more time with him as a result of the workshops. She "needed to be reminded" to spend time, she said. She reports the boy is "thrilled" to have books brought home for him. She believes his

vocabulary has improved and reports his increased interest in reading library books.

While questioning and discussion accompany the reading activities at home, it is not clear whether that is due to the workshop instruction in reading strategies. For Jane, one major effect of the workshops is increased closeness with her son ("We communicate more with a book") and sensitivity to his needs; she sees where he needs help, learns his interests.

Another important consequence is an increase in the amount of reading Jane herself does ("Reading often, instead of not reading. Once you get into reading, it's like a habit. So you start reading...All of a sudden, let me read this on the way to work, on the way back"), and her heightened pleasure in reading (she enjoys reading children's books she missed as a child). Although Jane does not permit her son in her room when she reads - she feels the boy will interrupt her - it seems like that he is aware of his mother as a reading role model.

While Jane feels the program has helped her serve as an effective literacy resource (she learned to select age-appropriate books), she contributes two unique elements of her own. She makes up long, imaginative stories for her son, and, stimulated by the workshop experience and possibly remembering her own reading-deprived childhood, she reads to a neighbor's child whose mother won't take the time to do so.

Jane referred frequently to her childhood with parents who could not read and her pretend teaching with her dolls. The workshops, she said, brought her back to her third grade class when, surrounded by books, reading became important to her because she wanted to learn.

Serafina R.

Serafina R., a soft-spoken woman who often has difficulty expressing herself in English, works at the college's business office during the day, and takes night classes twice a week. Her husband does not support her educational aspirations. Serafina has attended all of the workshops offered since the Program began. Her interview responses focus on reading strategies and vocabulary rather than the enjoyment of books. A major theme is the concurrent learning of both parent and child.

Serafina is concerned about the academic status of all her children and visits their schools, but is most involved with helping her 9 year old daughter. She reads with her daughter 30-45 minutes every evening in response to the teacher's warning that the child must improve.

Serafina clearly portrays her role as tutor attempting to apply why she learned in the workshops. She says, "I'm glad I'm learning things about reading so I can help her...All the things I learned from you I apply to my daughter." For example, when the daughter was confused about her history assignment, Serafina taught her how to make inferences while reading. ("I'm using things taught me. I look in my notebook and found the answer.") Serafina also feels she was able to help her daughter learn to read with expression and identify "cause and effect" as a result of her workshop experiences. Her ability to help her makes her "feel happy." She also asks the children to help correct her English.

While Serafina is not reflective about the factors that promote good reading relationships with her children, she clearly feels that the Parent Readers workshops have helped her to establish a different reading environment at home. The book borrowing has given her the opportunity "to spend time close to my kids" and she responds to their requests for reading no matter how tired she is. Formerly, she reports, the children went to their rooms to do homework while she did household chores; now the family stays in the kitchen together while she cooks or cleans. "...They read and I listen to them and then I read to them. I make a combination between my job at home, my studies, and my children."

Serafina's gratification at being able to help her children is reciprocated by the children's pleasure in her new learning. "..They know I'm able to help them. They say, 'Mommy, I'm glad you went back to school; you know a lot!'"

That comment and others suggest the likelihood that the children view their mother as a role model of academic achievement. Serafina herself takes on that role deliberately, directing their attention to the functional importance of reading. When the children are bored or puzzled, she sends them to books, and when something frightening happened, she used books for comfort and instruction:

> "Last summer, there was a big thunderstorm, everybody was frightened. I remembered some things I read in book... We all sat together in the room really scared at the noisy heavy rain... We started reading. It was really fun. They started asking questions, where lightning comes from. I said I can't really explain to you but I have a book will give you the answer."

Serafina also shares newspaper items with her children. In one instance - and here the distinction between role model and literacy resource begins to blur - her son got good test grades because of her information.

The Parent Reading workshops have been very important to Serafina. Not only have they enabled her to help her children, but they have lead to improvement, she believes, in her reading comprehension and English vocabulary skills. She has attended all sessions offered since the Program began. A shy person, she has appreciated the chance to share ideas informally with other parents in the college setting. Although she focuses on the study and functional aspects of reading in interactions with her children, when talking about her own development she mentions her pleasure at reading in English children's stories that she had known as a child in Spanish. Overall, the college experience has been a liberating one for Serafina. "Before," she said, "I live in a small world. Now I feel, sometimes I feel that I know the whole world."

Madeline G.

Madeline G, a nursing student is an exuberant mother of a 4 year-old daughter. She feels the Parent Reader Program has stimulated her to read more to her daughter and to do more reading and read faster herself.

As a result of the Program, Madeline now takes her daughter to the library every two weeks, borrowing about seven books for bedtime reading. As is usual with young children, the books are read over and over again. Madeline also brings books along whenever she takes the child out visiting. The strength of the reading routine she has established and the child's expectations of being read to may be gauged by an incident in which the child, staying with her grandmother overnight, insisted that the tired woman read to her. The child said, "Grandma, everybody reads to me before I go to bed. My mommy reads to me when I go to bed. You have to read to me." So the grandmother did. Others who read to the child on a regular basis are Madeline's male companion, an aunt, and teachers at her day care center.

Madeline clearly enjoys her reading relationship with her daughter which she says has brought them closer. She recounts the child's emergent literacy behaviors with delight:

> "She likes to read the books to me. She'll look at the page and make up the stories that goes with that (picture)...She makes up her own little stories. And then what is so cute...she gets all her little dollies and she'll sit them on the bed (for them to listen to it).."

Madeline says she is sensitive to the child's moods, as when she is restless or doesn't want to be read to and credits the Parent Reading workshops with teaching her how to select age-appropriate books ("..too many words on one page her attention span is going to drop.."). From their reading times together, Madeline

believes her daughter is learning to "use her imagination," have feelings for people in the story, and knows that books are a source of information from. Madeline also reports the child is learning something about story structure, that stories may be sad in the beginning, but have happy endings, for example.

In addition to library trips for book borrowing, Madeline's role as a literacy resource includes visits to libraries and museums for puppet shows and plays. She also extends herself to other children, visiting her daughter's day care center to read to the children there. Interestingly, in that setting although not in her reports of home reading, she asks the children questions "to see if they know what's going on" as was demonstrated in the Parent Reader workshops.

Madeline reports that her daughter sees her reading "all the time" and takes out a book and imitates her. The child also knows why Madeline goes to college and says he wants to go, too.

Madeline uses reading to help her fulfill parental responsibilities; she reports reading Parents Magazine since her daughter's birth. Now, however, she says she reads it faster and completes all the articles. This is important growth for Madeline who, in a behavior pattern typical of remedial students, used to skim headlines impatiently looking for something "interesting." Now, she gives herself time to get involved. ("..even though the title might not seem interesting, when I read like maybe one or two paragraphs, it's like Boy this is really interesting. I didn't think this was going to be as interesting").

Madeline feels that the Program workshops helped her realize the importance of reading. Further, she believes her own reading improvement is due to the fact that the Program stimulated her to read to her daughter. Madeline makes explicit connections between the child and adult learning:

> "I'm strengthening her mind when I'm reading to her. And believe it or not, I think when I'm reading to her, I'm also learning. Even if it's a simple story, I'm getting something out of it...it's like I'm building my vocabulary even if it's simple words...I'm building her vocabulary (too). Sometimes when I'm reading to her...I'll explain something in my own words...using a word that's maybe a little too big and she'lll ask what the word means. And I'll tell her. And she'll use the word."

Reading to the child has also lead her to read more for herself:

> "..I think that by reading (to my daughter) it has helped me in a way that it's making me read more. OK?

> Because if I wasn't reading to (her)...See when I read to (her), after I read to her, I want to read something. Something grown up."

For Madeline, the reading experiences in the Parent Readers workshops set in motion a cycle of intergenerational learning.

Gloria G.

Gloria G. begins the interview by describing her lively household - husband, dog, three daughters 13, 11, and 4 crowded into a one-bedroom apartment and the daughters turning her "crazy" by asking her too many questions at once. They are doing school reports. Laughingly Gloria says, "They think I know everything because I'm old... I just say, here's a dictionary and here's an encyclopedia. Look (it) up." Despite these protests, Gloria also engages in many information-sharing discussions with her children.

Mother as a knowledge source is a relatively new development in Gloria's household. Indeed, for many years, the oldest daughter, a bright child, used to "intimidate" her. "She used to call me a dummy," Gloria says. "She used to call me meathead 'cause I didn't know the words; I didn't know meanings; I didn't know how to pronounce words. Sensitive? Forget it!"

Gloria talks feelingly of her lack of education in English, the restricted life she lead as a result, and of her lack of confidence in her intelligence and her disdain for books. "A couple of years back, books to me, Eh it's a book, throw it to the side." Now she shows her children that books are precious to her. Now there is a changed dynamic between Gloria and her oldest daughter.

While her educational transformation is undoubtedly due to the college experience as a whole, Gloria attributes certain elements to the Parent Readers Program. She reports all of the children became more interested in reading since she got into the Program and began bringing books home. For her middle child, the end-of-semester reading party was particularly important; seeing all the children having fun reading and sharing books "gave her the energy" to keep on with reading, Gloria reports. The youngest child, at 4, is also oriented to books, carrying them around with her and pretending to read or asking her mother to read. The Program has also taught Gloria flexibility in her read-aloud style which she now adapts to the level of the child to whom she is reading.

The other major effect of the Program on Gloria, and through her on her children, was the recognition that it was okay to make mistakes. That has helped smooth the relationship between Gloria and her oldest daughter as well as promote learning:

> "..Now, if I find an interesting article, she'll let me read it to her. Before, she wouldn't. If I pronounce a word wrong, she'll correct me. And if she pronounces a word wrong, she'll let me correct her. So it goes hand in hand."

Through her increased educational, Gloria is serving as an intellectual resource to her children. On a more specific literacy level, she is bringing books into the home, and arranging library visits to her children. In addition, she serves as literacy resource in a wider arena. She uses workshop reading strategies and books tutoring youngsters in a community service agency as part of a field placement; she shares books with other children in her building and tries to teach their parents to read to them; and she reads to her mother - discusses newspaper articles with her and encourages her to push herself and try to read the New York Times.

Gloria is very proud of her children's achievements and delighted to consider herself a teacher of younger and older generations. In her college career, she sees herself as a role model for her children. "They're proud of me," she says. "I'm sacrificing myself to get my degree so I can get a good job. (So they can say) Gee my mom did it. I want to do it too." Gloria came to the Parent Readers Program when her educational transformation was underway; the Program helped her consolidate her literacy learning and gave her the confidence to offer reading resources to her family and the world beyond.

Alberta P.

Alberta P. attended three workshops, average for participants in the Program. She was selected to be interviewed because of the intensity of her participation and because the Program was so important to her that she sacrificed precious hours of sleep to attend. She is a nurse's aide who works the night shift, tends to her kindergarten son and his three teen-aged brothers, and snatches only a few hours of sleep during the day. She has temporarily suspended her studies in order to accommodate her youngest son's schedule.

Alberta is a religious woman with strict standards of behavior and high educational aspirations for her family. She describes her West Indian parents as bright and with similar values, but uneducated. Several of her siblings have college degrees.

Alberta reads to her youngest son at bedtime and they fall asleep together. Occasionally, the father and the 15 year-old read to him too. The father, a security guard in a library, often brings books home. Alberta says the child is "surrounded

by books." She was amazed, however, up receiving a list of recommended books from school to note so many that she hadn't yet read.

One source of conflict is the kindergartner's school homework; he resents the time it takes from storybook reading. In previous years, he was accustomed to spending afternoons reading or listening to his mother's stories and telling her some. He "hates school" according to Alberta; she has to make games of the homework in order to cajole him into doing it.

Alberta's energies are centered on her youngest. She is determined to avoid what she considers mistakes made with the older children. The 18 year-old twins are away at college and apparently doing well, but she insists that they could have been "geniuses" if she had put in more time with them when younger. She provided them with books, but did not give them personal attention. "Every summer," she said, we'd go to the library and get a heap of books." She would also obtain schoolbooks for the upcoming semester, and make sure the boys put aside two hours a day for reading. Alberta said 'Read them,' but, she said, "I didn't do the reading with them."

Alberta is now giving her youngest the one-on-one attention the older children missed. She started reading with him when he was an infant, alerted to the practice by a PTA workshop.

Alberta says she is "constantly reading" to her youngest son. She felt the Parent Readers workshops were very stimulating and liked going home with an armful of books. She read "about 18" books to the child after the first session. It is not clear whether Alberta attempts to involve the child in questioning or discussion when reading. However, she notes as a consequence of the home reading that her son now "talks back to her" by making up his own ideas and telling her stories. She says, "Before I would just read to him. Now he takes the book and he reads back to me."

Alberta reports that she was so stimulated by the Program that she told her friends at work, explaining to them the value of reading to children and encouraging them to read to their children. It is likely that the workshops provided validation for Alberta's home practices for she feels the workshops helped emphasize for her the importance of reading to children.

This parent's managerial style does not necessarily preclude openness or sensitivity to her son's development. On another occasion, Alberta commented with delight on her son's scientific curiosity. However, she was unresponsive when the interviewer wondered whether the little boy, who is young for kindergarten, might be overtaxed by homework after a full day of school.

Asked whether reading to the child helped with her own reading skills, she replied that it did.

> "It made me read more to myself...I stop and I ask what is the author trying to say because I can read the whole passage and not understand anything. So I stop and say what is he trying to say, trying to say to me... that helps me draw conclusions, break it down. I find myself trying even Aesops fables. At the end of it they ask you ...oh..conclusions, sum up what they have in mind ...and before I even finish it I try to find out what's (the moral)."

The excerpt above, referring to books and thinking strategies used in the Parent Readers sessions, provides another example of how reading to the child leads to effects on the parent's reading as well.

## Discussion

The mothers studied, as all participants in the Parent Readers Program, represent a motivated, self-selected population, conscious of their own academic needs and desirous of fostering the development of their children. Each parent studied created a home literacy environment - each distinctive - and seemed aware that they were functioning as a home educator. Ages of children and personal style shaped the specifics of their role as home tutor; all parents involved their children in reading activities with variation in their attempts to inculcate behaviors learned in the workshops and in reading relationship factors. The data suggest that the children in at least three households viewed their mother as a reading role model. All parents maintained contact with their child's school and one took a proactive role. In addition, stimulated to reach beyond Program boundaries, all parents served as literacy resource beyond the fact of bringing home books from the workshops.

The interview excerpts represent only a portion of the data collected. Other themes suggested by the data include a fuller exploration of the meaning of the Parent Readers experience to the adults - validation, a timely reminder, a chance to re-experience childhood, new learning, confidence, a social context of peer support and lack of pressure.

It is our conclusion, however, that the most important finding of this study is the powerful interaction between the parents' own academic aspirations and their work with enjoyable children's books in the Program and in home reading. In every case, intergenerational connections were made. The parents read to their children, were stimulated to read more for themselves and applied the reading comprehension strategies in seeking to understand both the children's books and their own adult

selections. It is our belief that the affective components of the project - experiential curriculum, peer interaction, building on parent motivation, the enjoyable nature of children's literature - are instrumental in developing the students' cognitive competencies related to literacy and in promoting abilities to transfer them to their children (cf Sticht, 1988).

The enjoyable, unpressured, personally meaningful learning environment of the Parent Readers workshops promoted learning. What are the implications for group intervention with poverty populations in other settings?

## References

Anderson, R., Hiebert, E., Scott, J. A., *et al*. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading*. Urbana IL: National Institute of Education, The Center for the Study of Reading.

Clark, R. (1983). Family life and school achievement: *Why poor black children succeed or fail*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Epstein, J. (1987) *Evaluation Models*. Paper presented at the conference on Maintaining Active Parent Partnerships sponsored by the Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis.

Epstein, J. (1988) *Parent involvement*. In R. Gorton, G. Schneider, & J. Fisher (eds.) Encyclopedia of school administration and supervision. Phoenix: Oryx Press.

Handel, R. D. & Goldsmith, E. (1988a). *Intergenerational literacy: The Parent Readers Program*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Assn., New Orleans, LA.

Hess, R. D. & Holloway, S. (1979) *The intergenerational transmission of literacy*. National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C.

Jacobs, F. H. (1988) The five-tiered approach to evaluation: Context and implementation. In Weiss, H. B. & Jacobs, F. H. (eds.) *Evaluating family programs*. New York: Adline de Gruyter.

Kirsch, I. & Jungeblut, A. (1986). *Literacy: Profiles of America's young adults*. Princeton, NJ: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Nickse, R.S., Speicher, A.M., & Buchek, P.C. (1988) An intergenerational adult literacy project: A family intervention/prevention model. *Journal of Reading, 31*(7), 634-42.

Slaughter, D. T. (1988) Programs for racially and ethnically diverse American families: Some critical issues. In Weiss, H. B. & Jacobs, F. H. (eds.) *Evaluating family programs* New York: Adline de Gruyter.

Sticht, T. G. (1988) *The intergenerational transfer of cognitive skills: Knowledge synthesis with policy, practice, and research recommendations*. Applied Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Inc., San Diego, CA.